

GAO

Briefing Report to Congressional Requesters

February 1988

FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

Participation by AFDC Households





Resources, Community, and
Economic Development Division

B-217883

February 11, 1988

Congressional Committees

This briefing report is in response to a request, dated July 14, 1987, received from the Committees listed at the end of this letter. As agreed in subsequent discussions with these offices, this report provides the latest available information on (1) the percentage of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) households receiving food stamp benefits, both nationally and for each state and (2) some of the reasons why the AFDC households in some states may not have higher food stamp participation rates.

In summary, we found that 83.4 percent of all AFDC households in the United States participated in the Food Stamp Program in fiscal year 1986.¹ Participation rates for individual states ranged from 93.3 percent (Michigan) to 58.9 percent (Virginia). In general, we found that because the programs count household income differently, many AFDC households that did not participate in the Food Stamp Program may not have been eligible to do so.

The Food Stamp Program, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service, is designed to help low-income households obtain more nutritious diets. The AFDC Program, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Family Support Administration, is designed to help low-income families with dependent children cover the costs of food, shelter, clothing, and other items of daily living.

Although both programs are designed to assist many of the same low-income households, their eligibility standards differ considerably. The Food Stamp Program's definition of

¹This rate is slightly different from the fiscal year 1986 participation rate of 80.7 percent, reported in HHS' publication Characteristics and Financial Circumstances of AFDC Recipients-1986. This difference occurs because we adjusted for missing data when calculating the statistic, whereas HHS did not make such an adjustment.

"household" generally encompasses all household members who prepare and eat meals together, but the AFDC definition generally includes only dependent children, their parents, and their parents or other caretaker relatives. A household that is an AFDC household could be part of a larger food stamp household, all of whose members would be included in determining the household's food stamp eligibility. A household that qualifies for AFDC may not qualify for food stamps because the income of the household members receiving AFDC causes the household to exceed the income standards.

Participation rates for the Food Stamp Program are tied to household composition. In general, we found that almost all households composed solely of AFDC recipients (known as AFDC-only households) meet Food Stamp Program eligibility requirements. Households that contain both AFDC recipients as well as persons not receiving AFDC benefits (known as AFDC-mixed households) may not be eligible for food stamp benefits, depending upon such factors as the income of household members not participating in the program. This appears to be an important distinction because nationally, according to the data that states reported to HHS for fiscal year 1986, the food stamp participation rate was 93.7 percent for AFDC-only households, whereas the rate was 66.1 percent for AFDC-mixed households.

On a state-by-state basis, we found that participation rates were similarly related to household composition.

-- The percentage of AFDC households participating in the Food Stamp Program ranged from 93.3 percent in Michigan to 58.9 percent in Virginia. A majority of the states had participation rates between 70.0 and 90.0 percent.

-- Participation rates for AFDC-only households were generally higher than rates for all AFDC households, from 98.9 percent (Alabama) to 74.8 percent (Nevada). A majority of the states had participation rates exceeding 90.0 percent for AFDC-only households.

²For this report, the term "states" includes only the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

- Participation rates for AFDC-mixed households were lower than rates for all AFDC households, ranging from 87.8 percent (Montana) to 44.6 percent (Alaska). A majority of the states had participation rates ranging between 60 and 85 percent for such households.

Section 2 of this report provides more detailed information on national participation rates and the reasons for nonparticipation. Section 3 and appendixes I through IV provide information on the variance among individual state participation rates and possible reasons for low participation rates in Virginia.

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We obtained the information in this report from the Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, and its Mid-Atlantic Regional Office in Robbinsville, New Jersey; the Department of Health and Human Services' Family Support Administration in Washington, D.C.; and the Virginia Department of Social Services in Richmond, Virginia.

National and state food stamp and AFDC participation data for fiscal year 1986 were obtained from the National Integrated Quality Control System, which collects quality control information for the Food Stamp, AFDC, and Medicaid programs. Our report's information is based on the most recent data available as of September 1987. Because of time limitations, we did not test the validity or reliability of this information. (Section 1 includes a detailed discussion of our objectives, scope, and methodology.)

We obtained official agency comments on a draft of this report from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service and Virginia's Department of Social Services. HHS officials directly responsible for administering the AFDC Program also reviewed a draft of this report. All of the comments stated that the draft report generally presented an objective and balanced description of the material. USDA and HHS officials made several technical suggestions that were incorporated into the report.

- As arranged with your offices, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we will make no further distribution of this report until 30 days from this letter's date. At

B-217883

that time, we will send copies to the Secretary of Agriculture; the Secretary of Health and Human Services; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; and other interested parties. Should you have questions regarding information contained in this report, please contact me at (202) 275-5138 or Mr. John Harman of my staff at (202) 475-4880.

Major contributors to this briefing report are listed in appendix V.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian P. Crowley". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Brian P. Crowley
Senior Associate Director

B-217883

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Chairman, Committee on Labor and
Human Resources
United States Senate

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, Subcommittee on Nutrition
and Investigations
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry
United States Senate

The Honorable Daniel Patrick Moynihan
Chairman, Subcommittee on Social
Security and Family Policy
Committee on Finance
United States Senate

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Chairman, Subcommittee on Domestic
Marketing, Consumer Relations,
and Nutrition
Committee on Agriculture
House of Representatives

The Honorable Thomas J. Downey
Acting Chairman, Subcommittee on
Public Assistance and
Unemployment Compensation
Committee on Ways and Means
House of Representatives

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
LETTER	1
SECTION	
1 INTRODUCTION	8
Differences Between Food Stamp and AFDC Eligibility Standards	8
Objectives, Scope, and Methodology	9
2 NATIONAL FOOD STAMP PARTICIPATION RATES AMONG AFDC HOUSEHOLDS AND SOME REASONS FOR NONPARTICIPATION	11
National Food Stamp Participation Rates Among AFDC Households	11
Some Reasons AFDC Households Did Not Participate in the Food Stamp Program	13
3 STATE FOOD STAMP PARTICIPATION RATES AMONG AFDC HOUSEHOLDS	19
Reasons for Virginia's Low Food Stamp Participation Rates Unclear	22
APPENDIX	
I ALL AFDC HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATING IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM, NATIONALLY AND BY STATE--FISCAL YEARS 1983 THROUGH 1986	26
II ALL AFDC HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATING IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM, NATIONALLY AND BY STATE--FISCAL YEAR 1986	28
III AFDC-ONLY HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATING IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM, NATIONALLY AND BY STATE--FISCAL YEAR 1986	30
IV AFDC-MIXED HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATING IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM, NATIONALLY AND BY STATE--FISCAL YEAR 1986	32
V MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS BRIEFING REPORT	34

		<u>Page</u>
TABLE		
2.1	AFDC-Only Families Participating in the Food Stamp Program in Four Counties--April 1986	13
3.1	AFDC Households Participating in the Food Stamp Program, Nationally and by State in Rank Order--Fiscal Year 1986	20
FIGURE		
2.1	AFDC Households Participating in the Food Stamp Program--Fiscal Year 1986	12
2.2	USDA Study of AFDC Households Eligible but Not Participating in the Food Stamp Program	16
3.1	Distribution of State Food Stamp Participation Rates--Fiscal Year 1986	21
3.2	Virginia AFDC Households Participating in the Food Stamp Program--Fiscal Year 1986	23
3.3	Virginia AFDC Households Participating in the Food Stamp Program, by Counties and Cities--Fiscal Year 1986	25

ABBREVIATIONS

AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
GAO	General Accounting Office
HHS	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
HRD	Human Resources Division
PEMD	Program Evaluation and Methodology Division
RCED	Resources, Community, and Economic Development Division
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

Two programs designed to assist low-income families are the Food Stamp and the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) programs. The Food Stamp Program helps low-income households obtain more nutritious diets by providing eligible applicants with coupons to buy food. Approximately 19.2 million individuals participated in the Food Stamp Program in August 1986. While the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service administers and supervises the Food Stamp Program, states are responsible for local administration and day-to-day program operations.¹ AFDC, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), is designed to help low-income families with dependent children cover the costs of food, shelter, clothing, and other items of daily living. States are also responsible for local administration and day-to-day operations.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FOOD STAMP AND AFDC ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS

Although the Food Stamp and AFDC programs are both designed to assist low-income households, the programs' standards for determining which households are eligible to participate differ considerably. Among the most important eligibility differences between the two programs are income eligibility standards and definitions of "household." The Food Stamp Program, for example, limits gross monthly income for most households to 130 percent of the poverty level, which amounted to \$959 for a three-person household in fiscal year 1986.² In contrast, states determine their own AFDC need standards. Vermont established the most generous three-person household AFDC need standard in fiscal year 1986 at \$841, whereas Kentucky established the lowest at \$197.

In addition, the Food Stamp Program's household definition generally encompasses all household members that prepare and eat meals together, but the AFDC household definition generally includes only dependent children, their siblings, and their parents or other caretaker relatives. A member of a household could be included in determining food stamp eligibility, but not AFDC eligibility, if he prepares and eats meals with household members but is not responsible for dependent children.

¹For this report, the term "states" include only the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

²An increase in the poverty level, established by the Office of Management and Budget, caused this monthly standard to be adjusted to \$988 during the last 3 months of the fiscal year.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

At the request of the chairmen of six Senate and House Committees and Subcommittees, we conducted this study to determine (1) the percentage of AFDC households receiving food stamp benefits, both nationally and for each state and (2) the reasons why some states' AFDC households may not have higher food stamp participation rates.³

To address these objectives, we obtained information from the Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, and its Mid-Atlantic Regional Office in Robbinsville, New Jersey; the Department of Health and Human Services' Family Support Administration in Washington, D.C.; and the Virginia Department of Social Services in Richmond, Virginia.

We analyzed national and state AFDC quality control data for fiscal year 1986 obtained from the National Integrated Quality Control System, which maintains quality control information for the Food Stamp, AFDC, and Medicaid programs. States are required to conduct quality control reviews of a sample of households receiving food stamp and/or AFDC benefits to ensure that they are providing the correct amount of benefits. As part of this review, states collect demographic information about every member of the food stamp or AFDC household in its sample, regardless of whether the member is receiving food stamp or AFDC benefits. The data include a measure of food stamp participation for a sample of AFDC recipients for all states except Louisiana and the District of Columbia, where state officials did not code these data. The data in this report are the most recent information available as of September 1987.

The results of our data analysis differ from HHS' published results⁴ because we adjusted for missing data when calculating the participation rate percentages, whereas HHS did not make such an

³It should be noted that this report does not deal with the broader issue of the percentage of potentially eligible households in the country that do not receive food stamps. We are currently collecting national data to determine why eligible households are not participating in the Food Stamp Program and plan to report on this later in the year.

⁴Characteristics and Financial Circumstances of AFDC Recipients-1986, Department of Health and Human Services, Family Support Administration.

adjustment.⁵ It should also be noted that HHS does not validate the information provided by the states. In reporting its own analysis of these data, HHS cautions that the information's accuracy has not been measured. Because of time limitations, we did not test the validity or reliability of this information.

We also reviewed Food Stamp and AFDC program laws and regulations to identify program eligibility criteria and other factors that affect food stamp participation rates. We discussed food stamp participation rates with USDA and HHS program officials and representatives of public interest groups. We reviewed reports issued by these organizations but did not attempt to verify the information contained in the reports. Because Virginia was a large state with low participation rates, we also discussed the state's food stamp participation rates with USDA and Virginia food stamp and quality control officials.

We obtained official agency comments on a draft of this report from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service and Virginia's Department of Social Services. HHS officials directly responsible for administering the AFDC Program also reviewed a draft of this report. All the comments stated that the draft report generally presented an objective and balanced description of the material. USDA and HHS officials made several technical suggestions that were incorporated into the report.

We conducted our review from September to December 1987. Except for not verifying the accuracy of the quality control data that we used in our analysis, we conducted our review in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

⁵We calculated the percentage participating and the percentage not participating by excluding cases that did not contain information about the AFDC households' food stamp participation, whereas HHS included these cases when it calculated these percentages. Our method increased some of our participation rate percentages slightly.

SECTION 2

NATIONAL FOOD STAMP PARTICIPATION RATES AMONG AFDC HOUSEHOLDS AND SOME REASONS FOR NONPARTICIPATION

This section provides national information on the percentage of AFDC households participating in the Food Stamp Program and presents some of the reasons why some AFDC households may not participate in the program.

NATIONAL FOOD STAMP PARTICIPATION RATES AMONG AFDC HOUSEHOLDS

According to our analysis of the data that states reported to HHS for fiscal year 1986, nationally, 83.4 percent of all AFDC households participated in the Food Stamp Program. (See fig. 2.1.)¹ For households composed of only AFDC recipients (AFDC-only households), the food stamp participation rate was 93.7 percent. The food stamp participation rate for AFDC households that included at least one member who did not receive AFDC benefits (AFDC-mixed households) was 66.1 percent.

Earlier reports on food stamp participation among AFDC recipients indicate similar participation rates. HHS, for example, reported participation rates for all AFDC households ranging between 80.1 and 83.0 percent for fiscal years 1983 through 1986, based on the same quality control data base that we analyzed (see app. I). In addition, when USDA studied ways to simplify the food stamp application process, it found that 84 percent of all AFDC households in its demonstration project sites received food stamps.² Finally, in a recent report,³ we noted that nationally, 96 percent of AFDC-only households participated in the Food Stamp Program (as of April 1984), according to the Census Bureau's Survey

¹This rate differs with HHS' fiscal year 1986 participation rate of 80.7 percent, reported in its publication Characteristics and Financial Circumstances of AFDC Recipients-1986. We adjusted for missing data when calculating the statistic, which accounts for the difference between the two results.

²Final Report for the Food Stamp Program Simplified Application Demonstration Evaluation (vol. 1-3), USDA, Food and Nutrition Service (September 1986). The Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 authorized USDA to conduct a demonstration project to test strategies for simplifying application processing and eligibility determination and to evaluate the demonstration's results.

• ³Welfare: The Income and Relative Poverty Status of AFDC Families (GAO/HRD-88-9, Nov. 4, 1987).

of Income and Program Participation. Our report also included detailed analyses of participation rates in four counties in different parts of the United States. As shown in table 2.1, we found high participation rates in a sample of AFDC-only households in these four counties.

Figure 2.1: AFDC Households Participating in the Food Stamp Program--Fiscal Year 1986

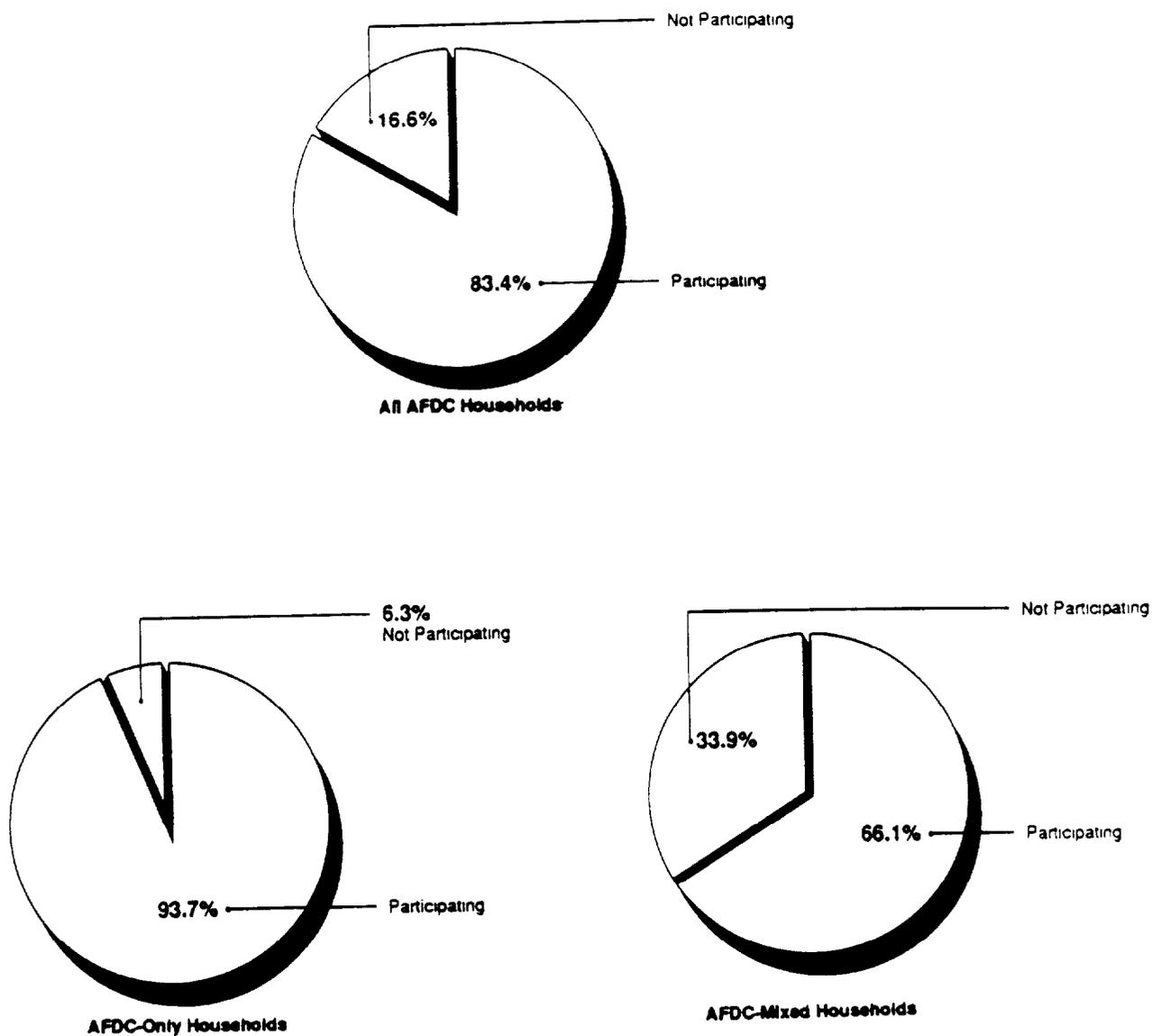


Table 2.1: AFDC-Only Families Participating in
the Food Stamp Program in Four Counties--April 1986

<u>County</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Fulton County, Georgia	94
Cuyahoga County, Ohio	97
Albany County, New York	99
Alameda County, California	89

Note: The counties were selected to provide a cross section of different maximum AFDC monthly payment levels for three-person families. In each county, a stratified random sample of 300 AFDC families was drawn from the universe of AFDC families with two, three, or four members receiving an AFDC payment in April 1986. Families of these three sizes represent 80 percent of all AFDC families nationally. Each county's sample was composed of 100 cases for each family size. In all, we sampled 1,200 cases, 799 of which were AFDC-only households that were used for this analysis. The estimated sampling errors at 95 percent confidence are 3 percent for Fulton County, 2 percent for Cuyahoga County, and 4 percent for Albany and Alameda counties. The participation rates cannot be projected beyond the county level.

SOME REASONS AFDC HOUSEHOLDS DID NOT
PARTICIPATE IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

In reviewing the information concerning why AFDC households did not participate in the Food Stamp Program, we found that household composition is a strong indicator of participation. Virtually all AFDC-only households met the program's eligibility criteria, whereas some AFDC-mixed households were not eligible to participate because of the income and assets of at least one household member. Improper denials and terminations of benefits also resulted in nonparticipation by some eligible households. Finally, a USDA study found that the primary reason for nonparticipation reported by eligible AFDC-only households was that they did not apply for benefits, and the primary reason for eligible AFDC-mixed households was that they believed or were told by food stamp officials that they were ineligible or that their applications were denied. (Section 3 provides reasons why, according to Virginia officials, Virginia's AFDC households are participating in the Food Stamp Program at a lower rate than AFDC households in other states.)

Household Composition Determines
Likelihood of Food Stamp Participation

The composition of AFDC households is an important factor in determining the likelihood of food stamp participation, as indicated by the fact that AFDC-only households participated at a higher rate than AFDC-mixed households. In fiscal year 1986, for example, AFDC-only households had a higher participation rate because virtually all of them were eligible for food stamp benefits on the basis of their income, assets, and other eligibility criteria. Although the Congress passed legislation during fiscal year 1986 making virtually all AFDC-only households automatically eligible for food stamps,⁴ almost all AFDC-only households were already eligible under existing criteria, according to an Urban Institute study of the law's effect.⁵

Although AFDC-only households did not have a 100-percent participation rate, it may be unrealistic to expect 100 percent participation in any public assistance program. According to an Urban Institute report,⁶ participation rates above 90 percent in the AFDC program are regarded by most analysts as a "saturation level." Factors inherent in many public assistance programs, such as some eligible persons' not applying for benefits or adhering to program requirements, make achieving 100-percent program participation virtually impossible, according to an Urban Institute analyst.

AFDC-mixed households, in contrast with AFDC-only households, participated in the Food Stamp Program at a lower rate because some AFDC-mixed households were not eligible to receive food stamps. These households include non-AFDC participants whose income and assets are counted for determining food stamp, but not AFDC, eligibility; these members may cause the household to exceed the food stamp income or asset standards. The following examples, provided by Virginia officials, illustrate the difference between AFDC-mixed households that are eligible and ones that are not eligible to receive food stamps.

-- An AFDC-mixed household receiving food stamps consisted of an 81-year-old grandfather, his 36-year-old daughter, and

⁴The Food Security Act of 1985, Public Law 99-198, December 23, 1985.

⁵Impacts of Categorical Food Stamp Program Eligibility for Households Composed Solely of AFDC and SSI Recipients, prepared by the Urban Institute for the Food and Nutrition Service (December 1987).

⁶Patricia Ruggles and Richard C. Michel, Participation Rates in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program: Trends for 1967 through 1984 (Urban Institute: April 1987).

her five children between the ages of 13 and 4. The grandfather received monthly Social Security and Supplemental Security Income benefits of \$360, and the mother earned no income. Because he was not legally responsible for supporting the children, his income was excluded in calculating AFDC benefits, and therefore the household received AFDC benefits of \$403 per month. However, because he prepared and ate his meals together with the rest of the family, his \$360 income was counted in the household's income for determining food stamp benefits. The household received monthly benefits of \$258 for food stamps.

- An AFDC-mixed household not receiving food stamps could consist of a 30-year-old mother, her two children under 18 years of age, and her 35-year-old brother. The mother earns no income and receives a monthly AFDC check for \$291. The brother, however, is employed and earns \$925 per month. As in the previous example, the brother's income would be excluded in calculating AFDC benefits but included in calculating food stamp benefits because the brother prepares and eats his meals together with the rest of the family. The household is ineligible for food stamps because the household's gross income of \$1,216, calculated by adding the mother's AFDC grant of \$291 to the brother's monthly gross income of \$925, exceeds the \$1,192 gross income maximum for a four-person food stamp household.

Improper Denials and Terminations

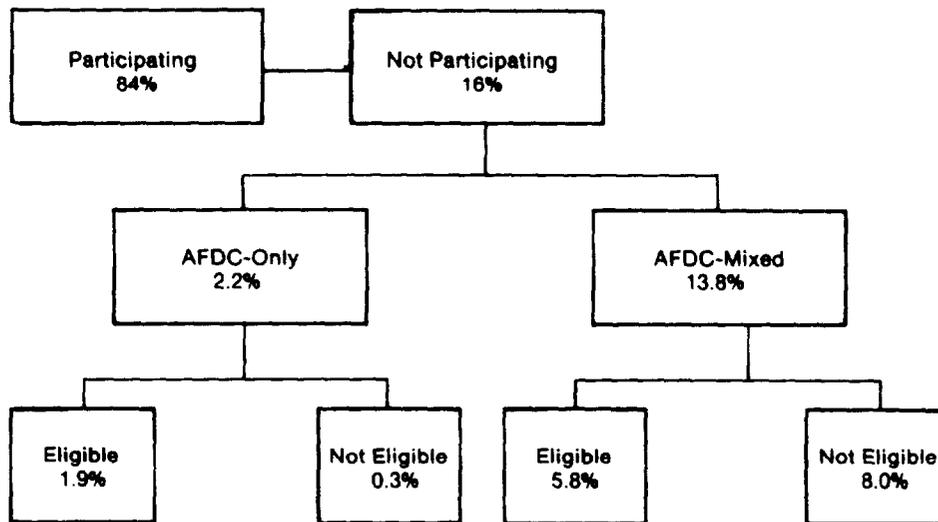
Apart from the issue of household composition, we found in an earlier report that all households, including AFDC households, may not participate in the Food Stamp Program because the local food stamp office improperly denied their applications or improperly terminated their participation in the program.⁷ Although states reported in 1985 that only about 3 percent of their denials or terminations were improper, we found that the actual rate may be much higher. We projected that the improper denial and termination error rates for the two states in our review were 22.5 and 12.4 percent, whereas the states reported error rates of 9.1 and 2.2 percent, respectively. In addition, in a review of 21 states, USDA found similar underreporting of fiscal year 1986 denial or termination rates. We are conducting another review that examines factors that affect food stamp participation by all households.

⁷Not all improper denials or terminations caused households to lose benefits to which they were otherwise entitled. For further information, see Food Stamp Program: Evaluation of Improper Denial or Termination Error Rates (GAO/RCED-88-12, Oct. 22, 1987).

Reasons for Food Stamp Nonparticipation
Given in a USDA Study

As part of a study of ways to simplify the food stamp application process, USDA conducted a survey of food stamp non-participants that identified some reasons why AFDC recipients who are eligible to receive food stamps may not in fact receive them.⁸ The study, which was conducted statewide in Illinois and Oklahoma and in two California counties (Fresno and San Diego) during fiscal year 1984, found an average food stamp participation rate of 84 percent for all AFDC households in the four survey locations (see fig. 2.2).⁹ Of the 16 percent of the AFDC households that did not participate, 2.2 percent were AFDC-only households and 13.8 percent were AFDC-mixed households. Nearly half of the nonparticipating households were eligible to receive food stamp benefits. They did not participate in the program, however, for several reasons, which are presented below.

Figure 2.2: USDA Study of AFDC Households Eligible but Not Participating in the Food Stamp Program



⁸Final Report for the Food Stamp Program Simplified Application Demonstration Evaluation (vol. 1-3), USDA, Food and Nutrition Service (September 1986), pp. 3.25-3.47. For GAO's evaluation of this study, see Food Stamp Program: Results of the Simplified Application Demonstration Project (GAO/RCED-87-102, June 11, 1987).

⁹USDA cautions that these rates may be underestimated because of difficulties in determining through available computer files whether an AFDC unit is receiving food stamps as part of a different food stamp case.

Eligible AFDC-only households that did not participate

According to the USDA study, 1.9 percent of the households were eligible AFDC-only households that did not participate in the Food Stamp Program. As their reason for not participating, they most frequently stated that they had not applied. They cited the following reasons for not applying (in order of reasons given most frequently): (1) the benefits did not seem worth the trouble, (2) they did not need the benefits, (3) they could not get to the office, or (4) they had never thought about applying.

The second most common reason cited by the eligible AFDC-only households was that their applications had been denied. According to the study, their applications were denied probably because of household and financial changes that occurred after they had applied, thus affecting their eligibility. The third reason cited for not participating was that their application was pending. The study noted that AFDC-only applicants that had pending applications were probably eligible for and eventually received food stamps.

Finally, the USDA study also found that some AFDC-only households were not eligible to participate. Although the reason for their ineligibility is not clear, the study suggests that the receipt of recent income was a major factor.

Eligible AFDC-mixed households that did not participate

Less than half of the AFDC-mixed households that did not participate in the Food Stamp Program (5.8 percent of the households in the study) were eligible for food stamps. Their most frequently cited reason for not participating was that they believed or were told by food stamp officials that they were ineligible to participate or that their applications were denied. Many of these households, according to the study, had a history of participating and being denied food stamp benefits, which suggests that their household composition and income fluctuated over time. As a result, the study suggests, after these households were told or began to believe they were ineligible, they subsequently experienced changes in income or household composition that made them eligible to participate.¹⁰

Some eligible AFDC-mixed households said that they had not applied. Respondents said they did not apply because (in order of reasons given most frequently) (1) the benefits did not seem worth the trouble, (2) they could not get to the office, (3) they did not need the benefits, or (4) they did not know how to apply for benefits. The study found little evidence that a stigma inhibited

¹⁰GAO is conducting a study of the effect of fluctuations in income and household circumstances on Food Stamp Program participation.

AFDC-mixed households (or AFDC-only households) from applying for food stamps.

Finally, over half of the AFDC-mixed households that did not participate in the Food Stamp Program (8.0 percent of the households in the study) were not eligible for food stamps. The primary reason for their ineligibility was that they exceeded the income or asset requirements for the Food Stamp Program, often because the households included at least one member with a full-time job.

SECTION 3

STATE FOOD STAMP PARTICIPATION RATES AMONG AFDC HOUSEHOLDS

The percentage of AFDC households participating in the Food Stamp Program varied significantly from state to state. Some states, such as Michigan, New York, and West Virginia, had relatively high participation rates for all, AFDC-only, and AFDC-mixed households. Other states, as shown in table 3.1, had relatively low participation rates in all three categories. For example, Virginia's participation rate was the lowest for all households, second lowest for AFDC-only households, and third lowest for AFDC-mixed households. Alaska and Nevada also had relatively low food stamp participation rates for all types of AFDC households. (More national and state participation rate data, including projections of the number of AFDC households participating in the Food Stamp Program, are in appendixes II, III, and IV.)

The participation rates for states varied according to the type of AFDC household. For example, the percentage of all AFDC households receiving food stamps ranged from 93.3 percent (Michigan) to 58.9 percent (Virginia), with a national average of 83.4 percent. An analysis of the state food stamp participation rates for all AFDC households, grouped together in intervals of 5 percent, reveals that 47 of 49 states had participation rates exceeding 70 percent.¹ (See fig. 3.1.) Of these 47, 28 states had participation rates ranging between 80 and 90 percent, and 6 states had participation rates ranging between 90 and 95 percent. None were higher than 95 percent.

For AFDC-only households the range is smaller--from 98.9 percent (Alabama) to 74.8 percent (Nevada)--and the rates are higher, which is consistent with national data. Of the 49 states that reported usable data, 44 had participation rates above 85 percent, and 33 had rates above 90 percent.

In contrast, state food stamp participation rates for AFDC-mixed households were lower and varied more widely--ranging from 87.8 percent (Montana) to 44.6 percent (Alaska). Nineteen of the 49 states had participation rates ranging between 60 and 70 percent, and 12 states had participation rates ranging between 75 and 85 percent.

¹Louisiana and the District of Columbia did not report food stamp participation data.

Table 3.1: AFDC Households Participating in the Food Stamp Program, Nationally and by State in Rank Order--Fiscal Year 1986

<u>All households</u>		<u>AFDC-only households</u>		<u>AFDC-mixed households</u>	
U.S. total	83.4	U.S. total	93.7	U.S. total	66.1
Michigan	93.3	Alabama	98.9	Montana	87.8
New York	92.9	Ohio	98.3	New York	83.2
West Virginia	92.8	Mississippi	97.9	Mississippi	81.1
Montana	90.6	Maryland	97.5	New Mexico	81.0
Rhode Island	90.3	Nebraska	97.5	Oregon	80.8
Oregon	90.2	Florida	97.4	West Virginia	80.8
Ohio	89.3	Indiana	97.2	Michigan	79.5
Hawaii ^a	88.6	West Virginia	97.0	Kentucky	77.6
Illinois	88.5	Maine	96.9	Tennessee	76.6
Pennsylvania	88.4	New York	96.5	Texas	76.4
Idaho	88.3	Illinois	96.4	Arkansas	75.9
New Mexico	88.1	Tennessee	96.4	Idaho	75.3
Iowa	87.7	Texas	96.3	Iowa	75.0
Mississippi	87.6	Kentucky	96.0	Illinois	74.4
Texas	87.3	Oregon	95.9	Alabama	73.3
Kentucky	86.5	Pennsylvania	95.8	South Carolina	72.7
Maine	86.2	Michigan	95.6	Colorado	71.4
Colorado	86.0	Missouri	95.4	Arizona	71.2
New Jersey	85.9	Arkansas	95.1	New Hampshire	69.1
Nebraska	85.4	Washington	94.9	Ohio	68.6
Wyoming	85.4	Rhode Island	94.4	Rhode Island	68.6
Tennessee	85.2	Wyoming	94.3	Maine	68.5
Wisconsin	84.8	Kansas	93.6	Utah	67.9
Arkansas	84.2	Idaho	93.5	Vermont	67.5
Vermont	84.2	Connecticut	93.2	Georgia	67.2
Washington	84.0	Hawaii ^a	92.9	Wisconsin	67.1
Alabama	83.3	Arizona	92.4	New Jersey	65.9
Missouri	82.2	Oklahoma	91.8	Missouri	64.5
Indiana	81.7	North Carolina	91.4	Washington	64.0
Maryland	81.3	Montana	91.2	Florida	63.4
Utah	81.1	Wisconsin	91.1	Delaware	63.3
Connecticut	80.6	Iowa	90.6	Nebraska	63.2
Arizona	80.5	New Jersey	90.6	Wyoming	63.2
New Hampshire	80.5	South Carolina	89.6	Hawaii ^a	62.8
Massachusetts	79.8	Delaware	89.4	Pennsylvania	62.8
South Carolina	79.5	New Mexico	89.4	Maryland	62.4
Oklahoma	78.9	California	89.2	Indiana	62.2
Kansas	78.8	Vermont	89.2	North Dakota	59.4
Delaware	78.6	Massachusetts	89.0	Nevada	57.4
Georgia	78.3	Colorado	88.9	Oklahoma	56.4
Minnesota	78.1	Georgia	88.8	South Dakota	55.3
Florida	77.1	Minnesota	87.2	North Carolina	54.6
North Dakota	74.2	South Dakota	85.9	California	54.5
South Dakota	72.8	Utah	85.5	Connecticut	52.4
Nevada	72.2	New Hampshire	83.5	Minnesota	52.0
North Carolina	72.2	North Dakota	77.7	Kansas	51.6
California	71.8	Alaska	76.1	Virginia	48.6
Alaska	65.4	Virginia	75.3	Massachusetts	45.2
Virginia	58.9	Nevada	74.8	Alaska	44.6
District of Columbia	NA	District of Columbia	NA	District of Columbia	NA
Louisiana	NA	Louisiana	NA	Louisiana	NA

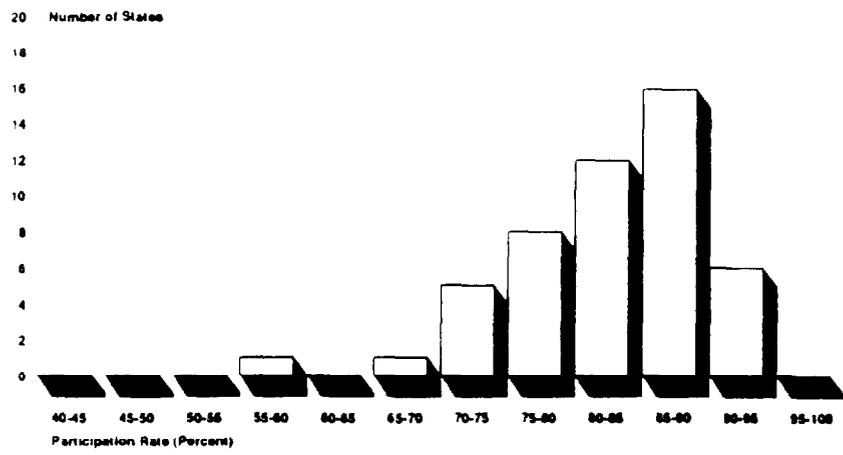
^aBased on incomplete data.

NA: Data not available.

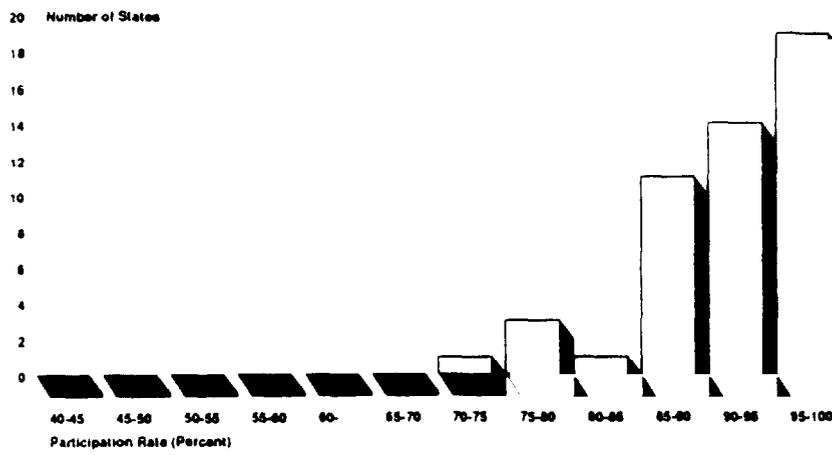
Source: HHS Quality Control Data Base.

Figure 3.1: Distribution of State Food Stamp Participation Rates--
Fiscal Year 1986

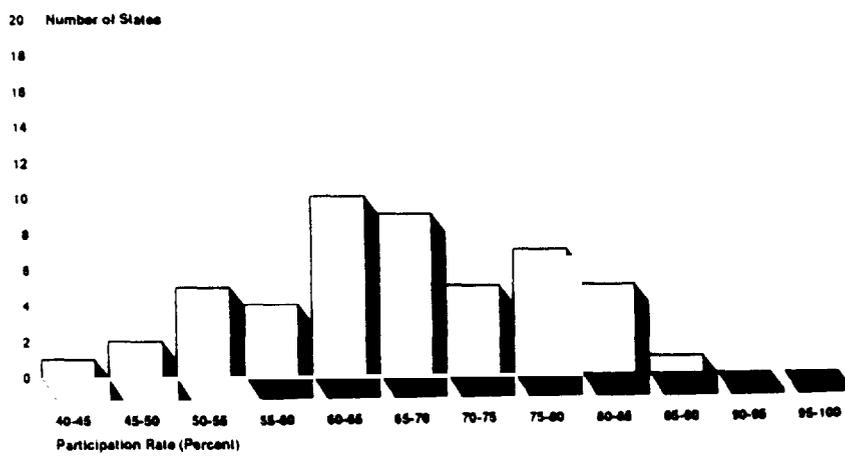
All AFDC Households



AFDC-Only Households



AFDC-Mixed Households



REASONS FOR VIRGINIA'S LOW FOOD
STAMP PARTICIPATION RATES UNCLEAR

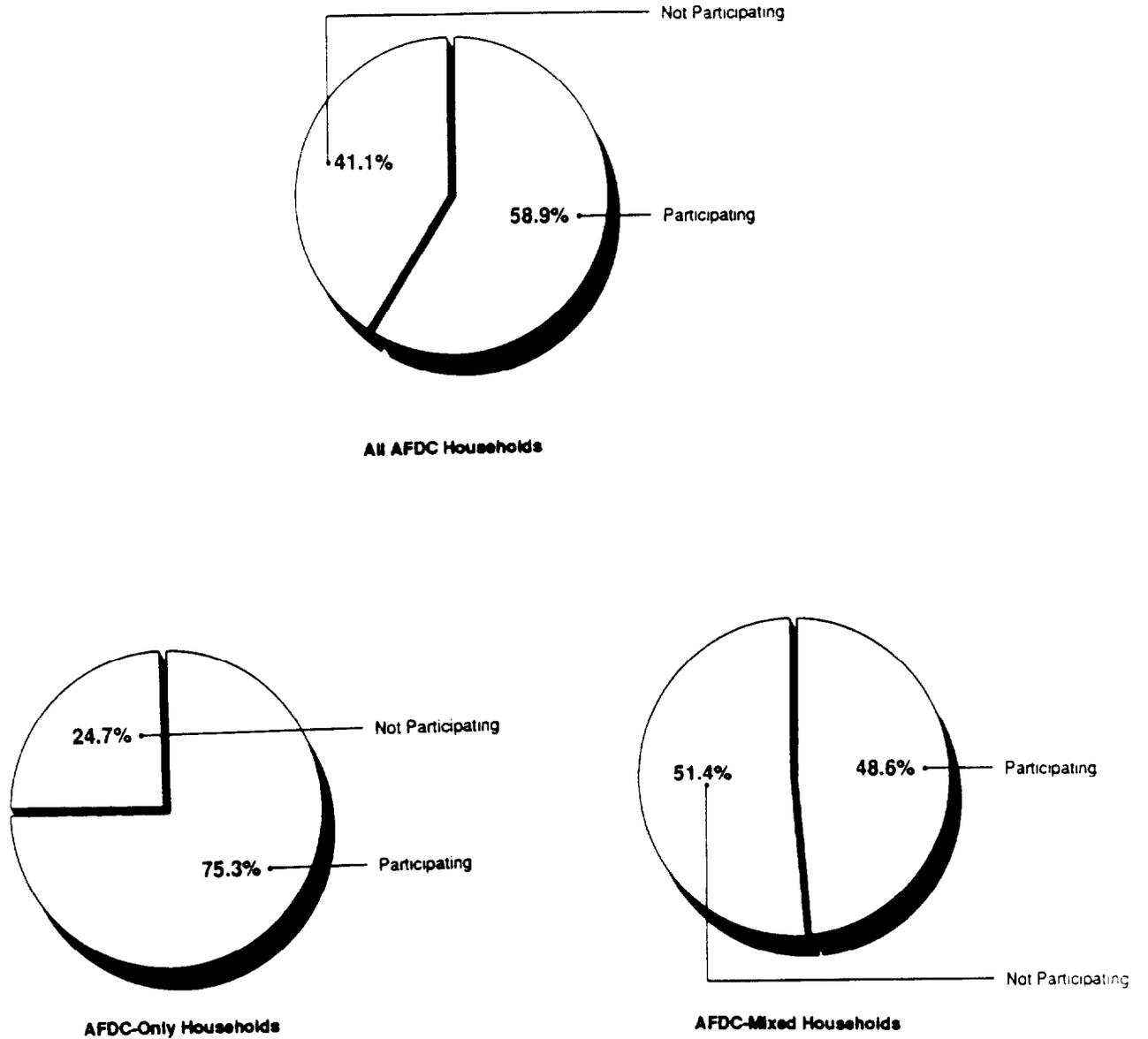
Because Virginia's participation rates were the lowest for all AFDC households in the nation, second lowest for AFDC-only households, and third lowest for AFDC-mixed households, we attempted to determine possible reasons why (fig. 3.2). We did not identify any definitive reasons. We discussed the Virginia rates with (1) USDA officials responsible for monitoring Virginia's program and (2) Virginia Food Stamp Program and quality control officials. However, because of time limitations, we were unable to review Virginia's AFDC and food stamp records.

Although USDA food stamp officials and Virginia food stamp and quality control officials agreed that the rate of food stamp participation among AFDC recipients in Virginia was low, they could not provide definite reasons why. According to Virginia officials, difficulties in collecting quality control information in some locations may have contributed to the low rates that were reported. They also suggested that the state's low food stamp participation rates may have been caused by the lack of sufficient low-cost rental housing in the state, which forces persons receiving AFDC benefits to live with others. Food stamp eligibility laws require many of these households to file together as one household. State officials did not explain, however, why this factor would have affected Virginia more than other states.

Virginia officials conducted a study which confirmed our results. Its October 1987 study of food stamp participation rates, which determined whether Virginia's rates had changed since 1986, when the data in our study were collected, found a participation rate of 71.1 percent. Although this represents an improvement, it is still lower than most states' rates in 1986.²

²The study is based on Virginia's recently established automated system for managing public assistance case records, which officials said substantially reduces the potential for data-coding errors. They noted, however, that the study determines participation rates by person rather than by household because Virginia's automated system cannot be used to determine household participation rates. Therefore, the studies' results must be compared with this difference in mind.

Figure 3.2: Virginia AFDC Households Participating in the Food Stamp Program--Fiscal Year 1986



The study also indicated significant differences among the food stamp participation rates in Virginia's 124 counties and cities, which agrees with our analysis of Virginia's participation rates. When we analyzed Virginia's quality control data, we found that county and city food stamp participation rates ranged from 83.7 percent in Norfolk to 28.2 percent in Lynchburg. (See fig. 3.3.)³ Virginia officials could not explain the variance in these participation rates.

Virginia officials said that they need to address Virginia's food stamp participation problem. They expect that implementation of Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act,⁴ which is designed in part to help homeless individuals receive food stamp benefits, will improve Virginia's participation rates. The act amends the Food Stamp Act of 1977 to allow persons under certain circumstances to form food stamp households apart from other household members who earn enough income to make the entire household ineligible for food stamps. According to Virginia officials, this act could increase the number of households eligible for food stamps, especially in rural counties, where, they said, these type of households are more prevalent.

Virginia plans to notify every AFDC household (approximately 55,000) by mail of the new law's provisions. The state also will contact households that filed applications after October 1, 1987, the effective date of the change to the law, to determine if the law affects their eligibility. Virginia officials also said that they plan to monitor statewide participation rates for the next few months to determine if these actions are effective.

• ³Only county and city participation rates based on a sample of 35 or more quality control cases are included in this analysis.

⁴Public Law 100-77, July 22, 1987.

Figure 3.3: Virginia AFDC Households Participating in the Food Stamp Program, by Counties and Cities--Fiscal Year 1986

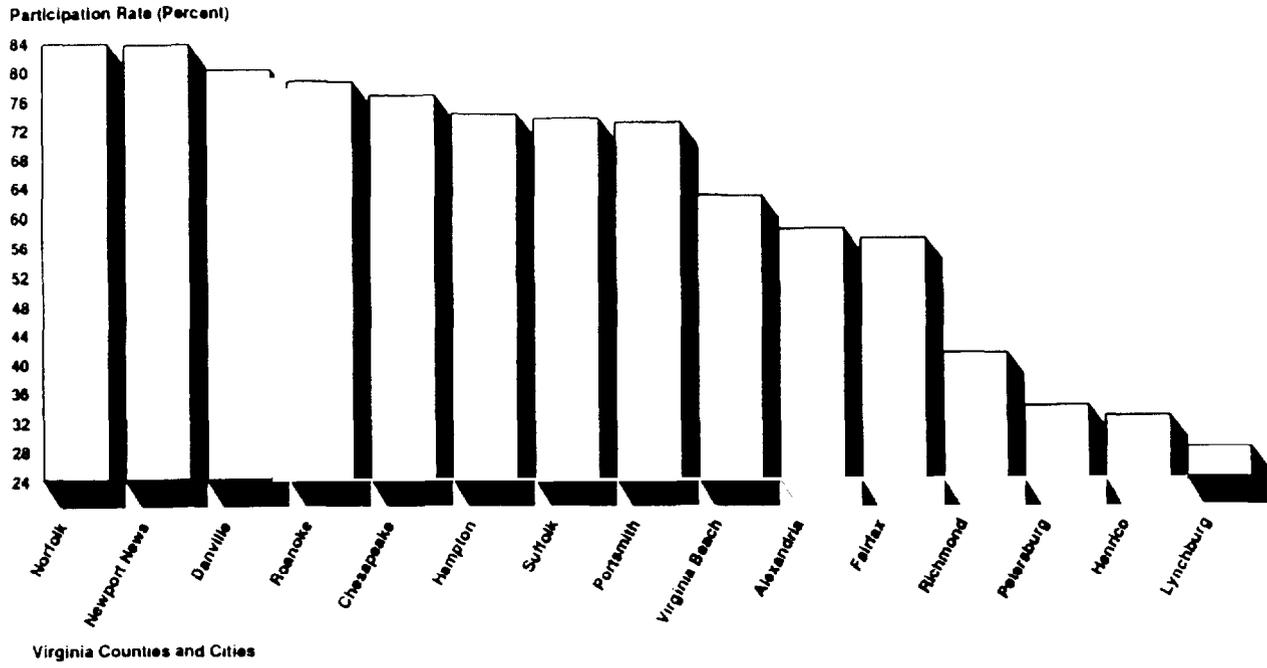


Chart includes only those counties and cities with 35 or more quality control cases reported

ALL AFDC HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATING IN THE FOOD STAMP
PROGRAM, NATIONALLY AND BY STATE--FISCAL YEARS 1983 THROUGH 1986

	<u>FY 1983</u>	<u>FY 1984</u>	<u>FY 1985</u>	<u>FY 1986</u>
U.S. total	83.0	80.1	81.2	80.7 ^a
Alabama	70.7	80.6	83.0	83.1
Alaska	70.3	67.0	66.4	65.5
Arizona	84.6	85.2	84.8	80.4
Arkansas	87.7	88.3	86.4	84.0
California	79.3	77.3	76.9	71.6
Colorado	77.0	77.1	75.5	79.5
Connecticut	80.6	82.4	81.7	80.4
Delaware	72.2	82.4	80.7	77.9
District of Columbia	NA	NA	NA	NA
Florida	84.8	79.7	79.0	77.0
Georgia	75.2	75.5	80.5	78.6
Hawaii	NA	57.0 ^b	52.9 ^b	61.6 ^b
Idaho	85.8	85.1	83.5	88.2
Illinois	86.2	86.4	87.4	88.5
Indiana	77.9	81.1	78.9	81.6
Iowa	77.6	84.5	84.8	87.7
Kansas	79.0	80.1	80.2	78.7
Kentucky	76.4	82.2	85.5	86.5
Louisiana	NA	NA	NA	NA
Maine	69.6	88.3	87.6	86.2
Maryland	78.0	79.1	80.1	81.2
Massachusetts	81.3	78.7	81.0	79.8
Michigan	91.9	92.8	92.7	93.0
Minnesota	80.4	80.3	80.2	78.0
Mississippi	79.6	85.1	87.0	87.6
Missouri	72.8	78.8	81.7	82.0
Montana	82.3	87.1	87.5	90.7
Nebraska	81.2	81.3	81.1	85.2
Nevada	42.5	5.2	51.1	72.2
New Hampshire	80.3	75.4	83.9	80.5
New Jersey	87.4	87.6	87.0	85.8
New Mexico	85.6	84.9	82.4	87.0
New York	91.5	92.0	90.8	91.1
North Carolina	61.5	61.5	69.4	72.0
North Dakota	55.6	63.0	74.9	74.2
Ohio	85.8	89.0	90.1	89.3
Oklahoma	78.4	77.3	80.9	78.3

	<u>FY 1983</u>	<u>FY 1984</u>	<u>FY 1985</u>	<u>FY 1986</u>
Oregon	91.7	89.3	89.8	90.2
Pennsylvania	84.5	86.9	86.2	88.4
Rhode Island	86.3	89.9	87.1	88.9
South Carolina	76.7	69.0	79.2	79.4
South Dakota	71.1	66.7	70.4	73.2
Tennessee	84.7	84.9	85.3	85.0
Texas	86.6	87.7	88.0	87.9
Utah	79.7	79.9	80.1	80.7
Vermont	87.2	88.9	86.0	84.1
Virginia	NA	36.7	51.7	58.9
Washington	83.5	84.1	81.9	83.9
West Virginia	84.7	90.4	91.4	92.8
Wisconsin	85.4	84.2	83.7	83.0
Wyoming	65.2	76.4	83.5	85.4

^aThis rate differs with our calculated participation rate of 83.4 percent because we adjusted for missing data when calculating the statistic, which accounts for the difference between the two results.

^bBased on incomplete data.

NA: Data not available.

Source: Recipient Characteristics and Financial Circumstances of AFDC Recipients for 1983 and 1986; unpublished HHS data for 1984 and 1985.

ALL AFDC HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATING IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM,
NATIONALLY AND BY STATE--FISCAL YEAR 1986

	<u>Participating</u>		<u>Not participating</u>		<u>Total AFDC households^b</u>	<u>Confidence interval^c</u>
	<u>Number^a</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number^a</u>	<u>Percent</u>		
U.S. total	3,070,380	83.4	611,131	16.6	3,681,511	0.4
Alabama	41,726	83.3	8,365	16.7	50,091	1.6
Alaska	4,446	65.4	2,352	34.6	6,798	5.4
Arizona	20,969	80.5	5,079	19.5	26,048	2.5
Arkansas	18,989	84.2	3,586	15.9	22,552	2.2
California	405,414	71.8	159,230	28.2	564,644	1.8
Colorado	24,028	86.0	3,912	14.0	27,940	2.5
Connecticut	32,496	80.6	7,822	19.4	40,318	1.9
Delaware	6,459	78.6	1,759	21.4	8,218	4.6
District of Columbia	NA	NA	NA	NA	21,325	NA
Florida	75,082	77.1	22,300	22.9	97,382	1.6
Georgia	65,694	78.3	18,207	21.7	83,901	2.4
Hawaii ^d	13,447	88.6	1,730	11.4	15,177	3.3
Idaho	5,589	88.3	741	11.7	6,330	3.6
Illinois	213,494	88.5	27,742	11.5	241,236	1.3
Indiana	45,501	81.7	10,192	18.3	55,693	1.6
Iowa	35,785	87.7	5,019	12.3	40,804	1.6
Kansas	18,362	78.8	4,940	21.2	23,302	2.7
Kentucky	52,064	86.5	8,126	13.5	60,190	1.5
Louisiana	NA	NA	NA	NA	80,249	NA
Maine	17,307	86.2	2,771	13.8	20,078	2.5
Maryland	56,537	81.3	13,004	18.7	69,541	1.6
Massachusetts	69,698	79.8	17,643	20.2	87,341	2.3
Michigan	205,437	93.3	14,753	6.7	220,190	1.0
Minnesota	41,983	78.1	11,826	22.0	53,756	1.7
Mississippi	46,721	87.6	6,613	12.4	53,334	1.4
Missouri	54,675	82.2	11,839	17.8	66,514	1.5
Montana	8,009	90.6	831	9.4	8,840	3.4
Nebraska	13,785	85.4	2,357	14.6	16,142	3.1
Nevada	3,950	72.2	1,521	27.8	5,471	4.6
New Hampshire	3,998	80.5	968	19.5	4,966	3.9
New Jersey	104,178	85.9	17,100	14.1	121,278	1.4
New Mexico	15,950	88.1	2,154	11.9	18,104	2.5
New York	342,207	92.9	26,154	7.1	368,361	1.4
North Carolina	48,276	72.2	18,588	27.8	66,864	2.5
North Dakota	3,594	74.2	1,249	25.8	4,843	4.7
Ohio	202,992	89.3	24,323	10.7	227,315	1.7

	<u>Participating</u>		<u>Not participating</u>		<u>Total AFDC households^b</u>	<u>Confidence interval^c</u>
	<u>Number^d</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number^d</u>	<u>Percent</u>		
Oklahoma	23,845	78.9	6,377	21.1	30,222	2.4
Oregon	27,702	90.2	3,010	9.8	30,712	1.6
Pennsylvania	168,680	88.4	22,135	11.6	190,815	1.8
Rhode Island	14,480	90.3	1,555	9.7	16,035	2.5
South Carolina	36,662	79.5	9,454	20.5	46,116	1.8
South Dakota	4,485	72.8	1,676	27.2	6,161	5.0
Tennessee	50,336	85.2	8,744	14.8	59,080	1.4
Texas	118,107	87.3	17,182	12.7	135,289	1.8
Utah	10,854	81.1	2,530	18.9	13,384	3.7
Vermont	6,424	84.2	1,213	15.9	7,629	4.0
Virginia	34,456	58.9	24,043	41.1	58,499	2.0
Washington	59,377	84.0	11,310	16.0	70,687	1.5
West Virginia	33,885	92.8	2,629	7.2	36,514	1.8
Wisconsin	77,364	84.8	13,867	15.2	91,231	1.6
Wyoming	3,417	85.4	584	14.6	4,001	3.6

^aParticipating and not participating numbers calculated by applying percentage rate to the number of total AFDC households.

^bHHS Quality Control Data Base.

^cConfidence intervals, calculated at the 95 percent confidence level, apply to the participation rate percentages.

^dBased on incomplete data.

NA: Data not available.

AFDC-ONLY HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATING IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM,
NATIONALLY AND BY STATE--FISCAL YEAR 1986

	Participating		Not participating		Total AFDC-only households ^b	Confidence interval ^c
	Number ^a	Percent	Number ^a	Percent		
U.S. total	2,113,834	93.7	142,125	6.3	2,255,959	0.3
Alabama	19,321	98.9	215	1.1	19,535	0.7
Alaska	3,414	76.1	1,072	23.9	4,487	6.0
Arizona	10,590	92.4	871	7.6	11,461	2.5
Arkansas	9,218	95.1	475	4.9	9,693	2.0
California	250,270	89.2	30,302	10.8	280,572	1.8
Colorado	20,715	88.9	2,587	11.1	23,302	2.4
Connecticut	26,025	93.2	1,899	6.8	27,924	1.5
Delaware	4,294	89.4	509	10.6	4,803	4.5
District of Columbia	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Florida	38,196	97.4	1,020	2.6	39,216	1.0
Georgia	38,250	88.8	4,824	11.2	43,075	2.6
Hawaii ^d	12,096	92.9	924	7.1	13,020	2.4
Idaho	4,242	93.5	295	6.5	4,537	3.3
Illinois	148,126	96.5	5,372	3.5	153,498	0.9
Indiana	30,098	97.2	867	2.8	30,965	0.9
Iowa	30,044	90.6	3,117	9.4	33,161	1.6
Kansas	14,125	93.6	966	6.4	15,090	2.0
Kentucky	27,874	96.0	1,161	4.0	29,036	1.2
Louisiana	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Maine	12,099	96.9	387	3.1	12,487	1.6
Maryland	36,593	97.5	938	2.5	37,531	0.9
Massachusetts	61,448	89.0	7,595	11.0	69,043	2.0
Michigan	180,316	95.6	8,299	4.4	188,615	0.9
Minnesota	34,711	87.2	5,095	12.8	39,806	1.6
Mississippi	20,186	97.9	433	2.1	20,619	1.0
Missouri	36,226	95.5	1,707	4.5	37,933	1.1
Montana	6,691	91.2	646	8.8	7,336	3.6
Nebraska	10,172	97.5	261	2.5	10,433	1.7
Nevada	3,490	74.8	1,176	25.2	4,666	4.8
New Hampshire	3,276	83.5	647	16.5	3,923	4.1
New Jersey	88,880	90.6	9,222	9.4	98,102	1.3
New Mexico	13,579	89.4	1,610	10.6	15,189	2.6
New York	258,994	96.5	9,394	3.5	268,388	1.2
North Carolina	29,249	91.4	2,752	8.6	32,001	2.2
North Dakota	3,031	77.7	870	22.3	3,901	5.0
Ohio	156,371	98.3	2,704	1.7	159,075	0.9

	<u>Participating</u>		<u>Not participating</u>		<u>Total AFDC-only households^b</u>	<u>Confidence interval^c</u>
	<u>Number^a</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number^a</u>	<u>Percent</u>		
Oklahoma	17,681	91.8	1,579	8.2	19,260	2.0
Oregon	18,340	95.9	784	4.1	19,124	1.3
Pennsylvania	141,927	95.8	6,222	4.2	148,149	1.3
Rhode Island	12,709	94.4	754	5.6	13,463	2.1
South Carolina	16,590	89.6	1,926	10.4	18,516	2.2
South Dakota	3,031	85.9	498	14.1	3,529	5.1
Tennessee	24,609	96.4	919	3.6	25,528	1.1
Texas	71,708	96.3	2,755	3.7	74,463	1.4
Utah	8,616	85.5	1,471	14.6	10,077	3.8
Vermont	5,207	89.2	630	10.8	5,838	3.8
Virginia	16,994	75.3	5,575	24.7	22,569	2.9
Washington	43,469	94.9	2,336	5.1	45,805	1.1
West Virginia	26,185	97.0	810	3.0	26,995	1.3
Wisconsin	61,369	91.1	5,995	8.9	67,365	1.5
Wyoming	2,692	94.3	163	5.7	2,855	2.8

^aParticipating and not participating numbers calculated by applying percentage rate to the number of total AFDC households.

^bHHS Quality Control Data Base.

^cConfidence intervals, calculated at the 95 percent confidence level, apply to the participation rate percentages.

^dBased on incomplete data.

NA: Data not available.

AFDC-MIXED HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATING IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM,
NATIONALLY AND BY STATE--FISCAL YEAR 1986

	<u>Participating</u>		<u>Not participating</u>		<u>Total AFDC-mixed households^b</u>	<u>Confidence interval^c</u>
	<u>Number^a</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number^a</u>	<u>Percent</u>		
U.S. total	875,084	66.1	448,795	33.9	1,323,879	0.9
Alabama	22,346	73.3	8,140	26.7	30,485	2.5
Alaska	1,028	44.6	1,279	55.5	2,304	9.7
Arizona	10,371	71.2	4,195	28.8	14,566	3.8
Arkansas	9,760	75.9	3,099	24.1	12,859	3.4
California	154,819	54.5	129,253	45.5	284,072	2.8
Colorado	3,312	71.4	1,326	28.6	4,638	7.9
Connecticut	6,494	52.4	5,899	47.6	12,394	4.4
Delaware	2,162	63.3	1,253	36.7	3,415	8.4
District of Columbia	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Florida	36,877	63.4	21,289	36.6	58,166	2.4
Georgia	27,435	67.2	13,391	32.8	40,826	3.9
Hawaii ^d	1,354	62.8	802	37.2	2,157	13.2
Idaho	1,350	75.3	443	24.7	1,793	9.2
Illinois	65,277	74.4	22,461	25.6	87,738	2.8
Indiana	15,381	62.2	9,347	37.8	24,728	3.0
Iowa	5,732	75.0	1,911	25.0	7,643	4.9
Kansas	4,237	51.6	3,974	48.4	8,212	5.6
Kentucky	24,176	77.6	6,979	22.4	31,154	2.5
Louisiana	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Maine	5,200	68.5	2,391	31.5	7,591	5.5
Maryland	19,974	62.4	12,068	37.7	32,010	2.8
Massachusetts	8,271	45.2	10,027	54.8	18,298	6.2
Michigan	25,102	79.5	6,473	20.5	31,575	4.3
Minnesota	7,254	52.0	6,696	48.0	13,950	4.1
Mississippi	26,532	81.1	6,216	19.0	32,715	2.1
Missouri	18,435	64.5	10,146	35.5	28,581	2.9
Montana	1,320	87.8	183	12.2	1,504	9.2
Nebraska	3,608	63.2	2,101	36.8	5,709	7.2
Nevada	462	57.4	343	42.6	805	13.2
New Hampshire	721	69.1	322	30.9	1,043	9.9
New Jersey	15,273	65.9	7,903	34.1	23,176	4.3
New Mexico	2,361	81.0	554	19.0	2,915	7.7
New York	83,178	83.2	16,795	16.8	99,973	3.9
North Carolina	19,035	54.6	15,828	45.4	34,863	3.8
North Dakota	560	59.4	382	40.6	942	12.0
Ohio	46,813	68.6	21,427	31.4	68,240	4.7

	<u>Participating</u>		<u>Not participating</u>		<u>Total AFDC-mixed households^b</u>	<u>Confidence interval^c</u>
	<u>Number^a</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number^a</u>	<u>Percent</u>		
Oklahoma	6,182	56.4	4,779	43.6	10,962	4.8
Oregon	9,363	80.8	2,225	19.2	11,588	3.4
Pennsylvania	26,794	62.8	15,872	37.2	42,666	5.6
Rhode Island	1,764	68.6	808	31.4	2,572	9.8
South Carolina	20,066	72.7	7,535	27.3	27,600	2.6
South Dakota	1,455	55.3	1,176	44.7	2,632	8.5
Tennessee	25,700	76.6	7,851	23.4	33,552	2.2
Texas	46,471	76.4	14,355	23.6	60,826	3.5
Utah	2,246	67.9	1,062	32.1	3,307	8.9
Vermont	1,209	67.5	582	32.5	1,791	10.5
Virginia	17,462	48.6	18,468	51.4	35,930	2.6
Washington	15,924	64.0	8,957	36.0	24,882	3.2
West Virginia	7,691	80.8	1,828	19.2	9,519	5.3
Wisconsin	16,014	67.1	7,852	32.9	23,866	4.2
Wyoming	724	63.2	422	36.8	1,146	9.2

^aParticipating and not participating numbers calculated by applying percentage rate to the number of total AFDC households.

^bHHS Quality Control Data Base.

^cConfidence intervals, calculated at the 95 percent confidence level, apply to the participation rate percentages.

^dBased on incomplete data.

NA: Data not available.

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